

Water Quality Standards

Sept. 20, 2001

Background: As you know, the CWA requires each state to review its water quality standards every three years. The last major revision to our standards occurred over six years ago, though we adopted minor revisions in 1997. We have been working on updates for several years. EPA must approve those updates and in so doing undertake formal consultation with the Services (USF&WS and NMFS) under Sec 7 of the ESA. The Services have indicated some aspects of our standards, particularly temperature criteria, are currently inadequate. We have been participating in a regional effort to develop guidelines for temperature with the Services, EPA, Oregon, Idaho, and some Indian tribes. Our standards revisions will also include significant elements that address transitioning to a use-based system, revised dissolved oxygen criteria, new bacteria indicators and antidegradation.

Status: A multi year effort by the program has involved numerous technical advisory committees, public workshops, and WQ Partnership discussions. The current schedule calls for additional outreach on the regional temperature guidance with formal rule adoption following that. We feel there are significant public interests involved and want to provide appropriate opportunity for public involvement.

Recommendation: Convene a broad group of stakeholders to address some of the standards issues in a facilitated discussion. We would need to focus on a manageable set of standards issues that would include but not be limited to temperature. The timeframe for discussions would be based in part on the schedule for regional temperature guidance. We would need assistance from participants in selecting, funding, and contracting with a facilitator. We would also propose a finite number of meetings linked to key events. We believe the current schedule for the regional temperature guidance has the potential to slip, however, a tentative schedule follows. If the regional effort takes longer, this schedule would be adjusted as well.

Oct. 1	Draft regional guidance issued
Oct. 1 - Nov. 16	1. Public comment period on draft regional temp guidance <i>Facilitated stakeholder meeting(s) to discuss and understand guidance, associated technical issues, areas of uncertainty and flexibility.</i>
Dec. 15 - Jan 30	2. Respond to public comments <i>Facilitated stakeholder meeting(s) to discuss major public comments received and help formulate Ecology's ideas for response</i>
Feb. 15	Final guidance issued
Feb. 15 - Mar 31	3. Make decisions on if/how to incorporate guidance into our WQS proposal <i>Facilitated stakeholder meeting(s) to discuss if and how to best incorporate guidance and develop approaches to implementation</i>
April	File CR102 - proposed rule revisions <i>Formal public process begins (this can include both formal public workshops and hearings, and informal meetings and discussions. It will also include consultations with the tribes, EPA and Services.)</i>
October ???	Adopt revised rule.